Watergate 'a real mess,' Mr. Average American declares

by TONI GINNETTI

The Average American thinks the Watergate scandal "is a real mess," that President Nixon knows more about the affair than he's admitted publicly, and that the spiraling inflationary economy is forcing Americans "to do without."

And if he had known in November what he knows now, Mr. Average American would not have voted for Richard Nixon.

Those may not be the opinions of every American, but they are the opinions of Richard Johnson, the man from Rolling Meadows who computers picked last year as the typical, average middle class American.

Johnson drew national attention as the star of two public television broadcasts last year, one on the average Amercan caught in the web of the inflation tangle, and the other a behind-the-scenes view of a presidential campaign through the eyes of the same average Joe.

HIS TV CAREER, made possible by the National Public Affairs Center for Television in Washington (NPACT), came to a peak in November when Johnson, after spending one week traveling and talking personally with Democratic Presidential candidate Sen. George McGovern, revealed he voted for Richard Nixon.

Richard Johnson

Now, however, in the wake of months of headlines and revelations on the Watergate scandal, Johnson says he would not have voted for the President.

"If I knew as much about this Watergate thing then as I do now, I hate to say this but I probably would not have voted," Johnson said yesterday.

During the week Johnson spent barnstorming the country with McGovern, NPACT correspondent Robert MacNeil asked him several times whether the Watergate affair, which was only beginning to unfold at the time, was influencing Jotnson in his consideration of the candidates.

"I KEPT SAYING no, it wasn't impressing me, and after asking me four times, they finally gave up," Johnson said. "In hindsight, I didn't know thatthis thing was so deep. I didn't know that much about the Ellsberg break-in (the break-in of Dr. Daniels Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office) but I'm becoming more convinced that Nixon knew about it.

"I believe that Nixon knows about Watergate. I think sooner or later Nixon will have to come out and defend himself. I think that without the tapes (the tapes of conversations in the White House that President Nixon has refused to turn over to Sen. Sam Ervin's committee investigating Watergate) they (the Senate committee) won't get to the bottom of it. But I don't think they will ever really get to the bottom of it. It's a real mess."

Johnson said that while he was on the McGovern campaign trail, the candidate did bring up the Watergate affair "but it didn't leave me with much of an impression because, as I said, I just didn't think it was as deep as it was.

"I give him (McGovern) credit because he did bring it up in several speeches, but I don't think he himself re-

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alized how deep this was," Johnson said.

"AS FAR AS I'm concerned now, I think if I had known then what I know now, I would just not have voted. I don't know what it (Watergate) is all going to lead to."

Johnson also has some opinions on the wallet-draining economic situation.

"I don't like these high prices. As of right now the business I'm in (Johnson works for the National Steel Service Center in Evanston), business has never been so good, but I hate to think what's going to happen when the roof caves in.

"As far as I'm concerned, I think the economy is about as high as it can get, but it's got to break," Johnson said. He said like most Americans he "doesn't know too much" about the Administration's Phase III and IV controls, adding "I don't know if he (Nixon) is swimming in all of this.

"I DO KNOW that I'm eating fewer and fewer meats," he said. "It's just ridiculous. I saw on television how farmers were killing chicks because it's just too expensive to raise them. When a situation gets to that point, it's bad news.

"I'll just do without," Johnson said of coping with the economy. "Inflation is here and it's a reality and if they try to call it anything else, it's poppycock as far as I'm concerned."

Like other Americans, he says the raises he gets aren't enough to keep up with rising prices. "I can't save anything. I'll be happy if I can stay healthy and my family can stay healthy.

"I'm just a middle class guy," he adds of his battle with inflation. "That's the way it is for everyone."